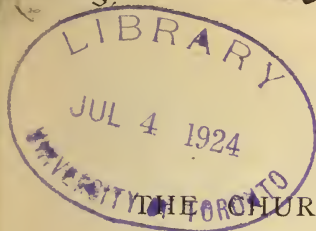


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THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO STATE QUESTIONS.

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A Paper read at the Wakefield Church Congress, October, 1886.

THE question which we are invited to discuss this afternoon is that of the advantage of an Established, not of an Endowed, Church. One constantly hears of proposals for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church, as if the two were inseparably connected. Now, if any particular Church were specially recognised by the State, and in connection with such recognition, were supported by the State—by money derived from the taxation of the people—while other denominations received no such assistance, it would seem to follow that on the withdrawal of the special recognition, in other words on disestablishment, the support of the State should be withdrawn, unless indeed, the support previously confined to one denomination were extended impartially all round. But if the revenues of the Church specially recognised by the State are derived from sources independent of the State, though regulated and secured like any other property by the laws of the State, then there appears to be no logical justification for accompanying disestablishment by disendowment, but it is in reality simply confiscation. The two things being distinct, we are not, according to the wording of the subject proposed, called on to discuss the question of the advantages of our *Endowed* Church; and, perhaps, it is just as well that it should be so; for, if we always take the two together, that seems to involve the concession that what is called disendowment rightly accompanies disestablishment, or, at any rate, it tends to foster in the minds of the public the notion that the two must stand or fall together. We are further invited to discuss the question of the advantage of *an* established Church, not that of the Establishment of the Church of England, though it may be assumed that we are concerned with none but Christian churches, and also that our own Establishment is more particularly, though not exclusively, in view.

Setting aside, then, the question of endowment, with the manifest advantages that flow from it, let us consider the question of establishment pure and simple, by which I understand a certain recognition of the Church by the State, involving certain privileges, and entailing certain duties of the Church towards the State. I say recognition, as of one body by another, for we can never consent to merge the Church in the

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State, or give citizens of the State, merely as such, a right to decide what shall be the doctrines maintained by the Church. This would be a very different thing from merely interpreting, in questions involving rights of property, what those doctrines are, which the State, as the guardian of property, has to do in the case of a voluntary just as well as in that of an Established Church.

In considering, then, quite irrespective of endowment, the advantage or otherwise of an Established Church, let us in the first place imagine an ideal state of things. Let us suppose, not merely that the great bulk of the nation was Christian, but that the whole Christian community was united in one form of worship and Church government. In such a state of things it would be the most natural thing in the world that the State should recognise the Church; that the undivided Church of the nation should in some way be represented in the legislature of the country; that the citizens should have a right to the ministrations of the Church, in accordance with the rules of the Church assented to by the State.

Let us now imagine an equally ideal state of things of an opposite character. Let us suppose that the State has recognised some one denomination in a Christian community greatly divided into sects, which keep apart from one another, and from that denomination. Let us further suppose that the denomination recognised by the State is one which imposes narrow conditions of communion, so much so, that it secures the adhesion of but a very small minority of the nation. In such an ideal state of things would State recognition be an advantage or not, and could it be expected to continue?

Now it *would* be so far advantageous as that it involves a recognition of Christianity on the part of the State, which I assume to be in the main composed of Christian people, or at any rate professing Christians. But as there are two distinct parties to any such recognition, and of one of these by hypothesis only a small minority are favourable to the special claims of the denomination recognised, it cannot be expected that such recognition would be continued. Nor would it, on the whole, I am disposed to think, in such a state of things be desirable, for it would be sure to provoke heartburnings, tending to still greater division.

In order that an alliance between Church and State should be freely maintained on both sides, the Church must be no narrow sect, but broad and comprehensive, endeavouring to embrace, so far as maintenance of principle will allow, the bulk of the Christian population. The State, on its part, must refrain from attempting to settle what the doctrines of the Church ought to be, or from attempting to enforce upon the Church the performance of acts inconsistent with the allegiance which she owes to her great Head. But while the maintenance of this broad and comprehensive character is expedient as a matter of policy, if the union between Church and State is to be maintained, it is not on that ground that I would advocate it. It rests on motives far higher than any consideration of mere policy. We all know how earnestly Our Lord, on the very brink of His passion, prayed to the Father that all His followers might be one; how he represented the conversion of the world as bound up with the unity of the Church. Now how can such unity be maintained in the face of the great diversity which exists in the feelings and mental constitution of different men, and of the fact that even the most spiritually clear-sighted individual amongst us, in our present state,

in which we see but as in a glass darkly, can only attain to a more or less partial and imperfect perception of the whole body of divine truth? Only apparently in one of two ways; either by the exercise of a central authority compelling uniformity and crushing out individual liberty, or by a wide toleration of individual opinion in matters not essential. We know what the former has led to in another communion, even to the assertion and admission of a claim to infallibility in the bishop of an individual see, who is held as vicar of Christ to rule over the universal church.

In remarkable contrast to any such claim is the mode of proceeding recorded in the 15th chapter of the Acts. Here we have a council presided over by living apostles, called together for the decision of so weighty a question, as whether circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law was incumbent on the Christian church for all time. In such a case, we might have expected *a priori* that the apostles would have been inspired to declare the mind of the Spirit, and would have claimed obedience accordingly. Yet we find no trace of this, nor on the other hand of such a thing as deciding on a point of doctrine by majorities. The question was long debated, and it is noteworthy that in one of the two recorded speeches, an apostle refers to a past revelation made to himself, just as we might have referred to scripture. May we not suppose that this was intended as a pattern for all time; to show how we might expect to be led into truth; not by dividing ourselves into parties, each holding aloof from the others, intent on exposing what are supposed to be the errors of the others, rather than lovingly dwelling on the great points in which we agree, remaining united in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and in a friendly spirit comparing notes as to views which are somewhat divergent. It has frequently been remarked, that error often arises out of an exaggeration of some truth, which has fallen into abeyance. When perceived it is found to supply a lack, and is vividly apprehended; and that it should be so is conducive to the welfare of the whole body, as calling attention to a neglected truth. But if the apprehender of the truth sets himself to oppose those who differ from him, and make a party of his own, then he is very apt to lose sight of some counterbalancing truth of an opposite tendency, and to fall himself into error. There are errors on the right hand as well as on the left of a central truth, and, if we concentrate our attention on opposing those who differ from us, without seeking first to go along with them as far as we can, we may indeed be receding from *their* errors, but at the same time we may be receding from the truth. Nor is that all, but by making no attempt to enter into their feelings and modes of thought we are almost certain to misapprehend them, and to lay to their charge things that they know not, thus driving them into further opposition; whereas by sympathising with them as far as we can, we might win them over more or less from error, and thus by approaching one another we should both be approaching the central truth which lies between us.

Now one advantage of a Church establishment is, that by securing the independence of both clergy and laity, within the limits mutually agreed to between Church and State, the clergyman, having a legal position irrespective of the fancies of his flock, is relieved from the temptation of refraining from the utterance of wholesome but unpleasant truths, or of accommodating his doctrine to the tastes of his hearers,

rather than regarding himself as the messenger of God, who is bound to set before them what he believes to be the truth of God. The layman on the other hand has a right to the ministrations of the clergy in accordance with the laws of the Church, laws recognised by the State, and is not in bondage to the fancies of an ill-judging, though it may be, well-meaning clergyman, who may be set over him. All this tends to a righteous toleration, to the habit of conceding to others what we claim for ourselves, the right to differ on non-essential points without the breach of Christian duty.

In connection with this subject I cannot refrain from alluding to one feature connected with our own Church establishment which seems to me of much value ; I refer to the great variety which exists in the mode of Church patronage. It secures the inclusion of various shades of theological opinion on matters which are not essential, keeping up thereby the catholicity of the Church, and holding in check a tendency to run on in some narrow groove of thought, and virtually erect into dogmas points which ought to be left to the freedom of individual opinion.

But even if we, the members of the National Church of this country, were thoroughly at unity among ourselves—and we may thankfully recognise a greater tendency towards unity of recent years—that would not be sufficient. We know that there are multitudes of earnestly-minded Christians who, for some cause or other, are not of our communion. With some it may be merely the natural and laudable tendency to remain in the communion in which they have been brought up from childhood, and with which their earliest religious feelings are associated. Others, and especially the less educated, prefer a simpler form of worship to that which our liturgy affords. But others again entertain deep seated convictions respecting certain portions of our formularies, which prevent them from conscientiously joining in full communion with us.

Difficulties arising merely from predilections are not, I think, very serious, and are likely to wear away before advancing unity. Considerable freedom has of late years been obtained towards varying our services, and holding additional services to meet the wants of great masses of our countrymen in populous places. But in connection with this, I must allude to a hindrance which still exists in most places, and the serious nature of which, at least in densely populated places, has recently been strikingly brought out by the testimony of those who, as belonging to the classes more immediately concerned, are the best qualified to judge : I allude to the appropriation of a large number of the best placed seats in our churches to those who can afford to pay for them. A strong movement is now on foot to remove this abuse.

The third cause of estrangement which I have mentioned touches on delicate ground. It is just the persons who are most earnestly minded, and with whom we should be the most desirous of being joined, who would be likely to feel the deepest convictions. Sometimes it is true the objections may arise from misapprehension. In such cases surely there seems room for explanation, and the honesty of the explanations would be more likely to be admitted, if an earnest desire were shown for unity, and a readiness to concede in case of reasonable objection. And I do not think it can be maintained that no reasonable objections can be

offered. That which is human is liable to human imperfections, and may not be looked on as infallible. It may be that formularies or standards which date from somewhat early times, when the Church's trials were of a different character from those with which she has now to contend, or else which were framed in times of great theological excitement, require some slight adaptations to meet the wants of the present day. Surely the Church is not a motionless crystallization, but, if she is true to her mission, a living body animated by the influence of the Spirit; surely the promise of her Great Head to be with her is not limited to the first few centuries. I cannot help thinking that some changes of the kind I am now considering must ultimately be made, before we can hope to include in the National Church the great bulk of earnest Christians in the nation.

As to the mode of effecting any such changes in the case of our own Church, we must remember that we are here touching on the compact between Church and State, and that the consent of both parties is requisite. Obviously Parliament is no place for theological discussions, and the proposal of any such changes must emanate from the Church. But even if embodied in a bill in the ordinary way, they would be calculated to give rise to discussions which would be unseemly in such a place. The remedy appears to lie in the mechanism contained in the Bishop of London's Bill, directing that the proposed changes should be laid before both houses of Parliament; and then, if they were not objected to by either house within a specified time, it should be lawful for her Majesty to confirm them, and they would become law.

Are we to regard the necessity for some such proceeding on the part of the State as a fetter which the Church cannot brook? I do not think so; I think it may even be an advantage, as a safeguard against intolerance. It is conceivable that in some time of theological excitement changes might be proposed which would interfere too much with liberty; in such a case it would be very desirable to be able to put on the drag.

But, though I do think that some changes are desirable in the abstract, I do not think that we are ripe for them at present. Unity must begin at home; and till we have learned more to tolerate differences of view on minor points, and cheerfully to recognise the good that is being done by those of other schools of thought from ourselves, we are not likely to arrive at such a consensus of opinion as would justify the proposal of changes, such as I have hinted at, designed with a view to the inclusion of those who, on conscientious grounds, feel themselves at present unable to join us.



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